

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# Veterinary Education in Indiana: From Horses to Hogs to the Human-Animal Bond

By Dr. Donald F. Smith  
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Though Purdue's first veterinary class graduated just over 50 years ago (in 1963), there had been a long and vibrant history of veterinary education dating back to the 1890s.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Indiana was home to the fourth-largest private college in the country—the Indiana Veterinary College<sup>1</sup>—that progressed from a two-year program, to a three- and eventually a four-year period of study. When the college closed in 1924, the AVMA referred to its “honorable existence for over 30 years,”<sup>2</sup> and noted that there remained only eleven veterinary colleges in the country. “Whether these [eleven colleges] will satisfactorily discharge the responsibilities which have fallen upon their shoulders, time only will tell.”<sup>3</sup>

A smaller college in Terre Haute did not operate as long,<sup>4</sup> but is reported to have contained impressive clinical facilities including those for dogs and cats. That was unusual because the major focus sustaining for-profit schools in that era was the medical management of the large numbers of city horses which were the mainstay of urban commerce and personal conveyance before the arrival of the internal combustion engine. With the disappearance of the horse, the impact of WWI and increasing regulatory challenges, the for-profit colleges of that era all closed.

Meanwhile, some 60 miles northwest of Indianapolis in West Lafayette, Purdue University began instruction as the state's land grant university in 1874. A vibrant animal and public health research program within the Department of Veterinary Science in the School of Agriculture soon began to develop. The second department chair was Walter L. Williams who had studied at McGill in Canada under physician William Osler. Williams was a passionate researcher, educator and clinician.<sup>5</sup> Though he stayed only a few years before being recruited to New York by James Law as one of the founding faculty at Cornell, he left an indelible mark on the reputation for quality and rigor in the new department at Purdue.

The department soon developed a program in bacteriology and milk quality under physician/veterinarian, A.W. Bitting; and hog cholera under veterinarian Robert A. Craig, who remained department chair until his death in 1939. Under Craig's leadership, a hog cholera virus and antiserum facility was established at Purdue that served the entire state and gained national recognition. Research programs were also established in Brucellosis, swine dysentery

and other important livestock diseases. During the 1940s, graduate programs at the MS and PhD levels were established, and the teaching of veterinary courses to undergraduate agriculture students expanded.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of WWII, seven veterinary colleges were established at other universities, including at the land grant universities in neighboring Illinois, Minnesota and Missouri; and the Purdue trustees started planning a veterinary college of their own. Established in 1957,<sup>7</sup> the college was first called the School of Veterinary Science and Medicine to recognize its foundation in the former Department of Veterinary Science and its ongoing commitment to research and scholarship.<sup>8</sup>

The development of the college in the 1960s coincided with several major changes in the veterinary profession. Though still critically important in a state with a strong agricultural economy, livestock and public health were no longer the only priorities. Companion animal medicine was becoming an important aspect of veterinary education, research and clinical practice, and more faculty were being appropriated to this burgeoning field of study. Clinical specialties were becoming established to supplement primary care practice, and new techniques including radiation imaging were becoming commonplace as the dogs, cats and other pets moved into households and became part of the family structure.

Purdue also tested innovative curricular initiatives with a goal of allowing students to spend more instructional time in the clinical areas of their choice. Faculty experimented with new educational technologies, including the “Block System” for scheduling courses, and Purdue became known nationally for many of these advances.

In 1982 the Center for the Human-Animal Bond<sup>9</sup> was established, marking the growing recognition of the importance of pets within the family structure, and the critical role that pets and other animals play in the psychological and physiological health of humans.<sup>10</sup> Purdue’s 21<sup>st</sup> century research involving animal and human health and the biomedical sciences also is impacting such strategic areas as oncology, biosecurity and infectious diseases.

Over a century and a quarter of advancing animal and human health, Indiana educational programs have covered the spectrum from the private, for profit urban colleges of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the land grant’s veterinary science department model of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the comprehensive veterinary medical college of the last 60 years.

In some respects, it’s a microcosm of the entire history of veterinary medicine in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Indiana Veterinary College (1892–1924) graduated 884 students.

<sup>2</sup> Another College Closes. J Am Vet Med Assoc 1924; 65(4): 401-403.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Terra Haute Veterinary College (1909-18) graduated 145 students

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, Donald F. Walter Williams, Cornell's Only Non-Credentialed Veterinary Faculty. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. January 27, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Stockton, Jack J (editor). A Century of Service. Veterinary Medicine in Indiana 1884-1984. (Indiana Veterinary Medical Association 1984) p 126-129.

<sup>7</sup> The first class graduated in 1963.

<sup>8</sup> In 1973, the name was changed to the College of Veterinary Medicine

<sup>9</sup> Originally called the Center for Applied Ethology and Human-Animal Bond

<sup>10</sup> Also the impact that humans have on pets. See [Center for the Human-Animal Bond](#).

#### KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine  
Indiana  
Purdue University  
Department of Veterinary Sciences  
Walter Williams  
Hugh Lewis  
Center of Human-Animal Bond  
Indiana Veterinary College  
Terra Haute Veterinary College  
A.W. Bitting  
Robert A. Craig

#### TOPIC:

Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine

#### LEADING QUESTION:

What veterinary college was established in the 1950s?

#### META-SUMMARY:

An historical look at veterinary medical education in the State of Indiana.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

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*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.